with us commented on how much fund everyone was having, and said there were so many fun things going on it was like a 10 ring circus.

We had two sixth grade volunteers (Debra Gorden and Shannon Vandenberg) from Blandford school (which is a Grand Rapids Public school for 6th grade students who have excelled in elementary school.) These girls worked a booth giving away tattoos, stickers, magnifying glasses and ChemMatters Magazine, with the help of two chemistry students from GRCC (Grand Rapids Community College). They loved working with the college guys and were smiling all day. The college students were very nice and inspired the young girls into an interest in college and disproved the stereotype of the geeky chemist.

Through this National Chemistry Week thousands of children will learn about the earth's atmosphere and the solar system through hands-on events and demonstrations.

I commend the American Chemical Society for stimulating our children's interest in the chemical sciences so that they will not only be interested, but will consider careers in these fields and potentially discover the innovations of the future.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution recognizing the goals and ideals of National Chemistry Week.

Today, I am pleased that we are considering this resolution recognizing the importance of chemistry to our everyday lives. This resolution supports the goals and ideals of National Chemistry Week. It recognizes the important contributions of chemical scientists and engineers to technological progress and the health of many industries. In addition, it encourages the people of the United States to observe National Chemistry Week, which, this year, is October 19–25.

The chemical sciences provide an enabling infrastructure that delivers the foods, fuels, medicine, and materials that are part of our everyday lives. The contributions of chemical scientists and engineers are central to the technological progress and the health of many industries.

I commend the American Chemical Society for establishing National Chemistry Week in 1987. During National Chemistry Week, volunteers from across the United States will teach children about air, the atmosphere and the solar system. The theme in 2003, ''Earth's Atmosphere and Beyond,'' was chosen to honor the 100th anniversary of Orville and Wilbur Wright's flight from Kitty Hawk, NC. It is important to stimulate children's interest in the chemical sciences so that they will consider careers in these fields and potentially discover the innovations of the future.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution recognizing the goals and ideals of National Chemistry Week.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I have no other requests for speakers but, again, in conclusion, let me just say that I commend the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) for bringing forward this resolution. And I urge all of my colleagues to support its adoption.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SCHROCK). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 395.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOGNIZING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE CONGRESSIONAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 279) recognizing the significance of the anniversary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program, and reaffirming the commitment to support the use of science in governmental decision-making through such Program.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 279

Whereas Congress hosted the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) first Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows 30 years ago in 1973;

Whereas the AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program was the first to provide an opportunity for Ph.D.-level scientists and engineers to learn about the policymaking process while bolstering the technical expertise available to Members of Congress and staff;

Whereas Members of Congress hold the AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program in high regard for the substantial contributions that Fellows have made, serving both in personal offices and on committee staff;

Whereas the Congress is increasingly involved in public policy issues of a scientific and technical nature and recognizes the need to develop additional in-house expertise in the areas of science and engineering;

Whereas more than 800 individuals have held AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowships since 1973;

Whereas the AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows represent the full range of physical, biological, and social sciences, and all fields of engineering;

Whereas the AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows bring to the Congress new insights and ideas, extensive knowledge, and perspectives from a variety of disciplines;

Whereas the AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows learn about legislative, oversight, and investigative activities through assignments that offer a wide array of responsibilities;

Whereas AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowships provide an opportunity for scientists and engineers to transition into careers in government service; and

Whereas many former AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows return to their disciplines and share knowledge with students and peers to encourage more scientists and engineers to participate in informing government processes: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress—

(1) recognizes the significance of the anniversary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program;

(2) acknowledges the value of 30 years of participation by the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows; and

(3) reaffirms its commitment to support the use of science in governmental decision-making through the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H. Con. Res. 279, the concurrent resolution now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today I am pleased that we are considering this resolution recognizing the 30th anniversary of the Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program coordinated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, better known as AAAS.

This resolution has bipartisan support from 26 cosponsors. It recognizes a truly valuable educational program that gives scientists a wonderful opportunity to step out of the lab and into the political process. By working as legislative assistants in congressional offices, they get a behind-the-scenes look at how our laws are made, writing speeches, developing legislation, and serving as liaisons to committees on which a Member serves. At the same time Members of Congress and other policy makers gain a valuable new resource to help them better understand the scientific and technical issues underpinning complex policy debates.

Six different fellows have served on my staff and each one has used their unique talents and understanding to help shape my legislative agenda. One in particular contributed greatly to this Nation at the time I was rewriting the Nation's science policy at the request of Speaker Gingrich and Chairman SENSENBRENNER. Sharon Hayes played a key role in the preparation of that report, which has been widely used and quoted throughout the scientific community.

After 30 years, this program is still going strong. Over 800 scientists have now served Republican, Democratic, and Independent Members of Congress

and many are currently working for Congress and the administration. These individuals have contributed not only their scientific expertise, but also a fresh perspective to policy making. I urge my colleagues to recognize the success of this program by supporting this resolution to honor the AAAS Congressional Fellowship Program.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of House Concurrent Resolution 279. This resolution recognizes the 30th anniversary of the Congressional Fellowship Program instituted by the American Association of Advancement of Science. I congratulate the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) for taking the initiative to develop this resolution.

The AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program has provided congressional committees and Members' offices with scientific and technical expertise that has greatly benefited governmental decision-making for three decades. The Committee on Science has made frequent use of AAAS fellows over the life of the program, and several subsequently have served on the professional staff of the committee.

I know that many of my colleagues have repeatedly sought AAAS fellows for their personal offices because of the quality of the contributions they have made. The issues confronting Congress increasingly involve scientific and technical aspects. Ph.D.-level scientists and engineers serving as congressional fellows bolster the technical expertise available to Members and staff by bringing to bear extensive knowledge and fresh insights and perspectives.

The presence of congressional fellows enhances the public policy formulation process. In addition, the program provides fellows with a window of the policy formulation process and the workings of Congress that they take back to their home institutions. It also provides a mechanism that many fellows have used to transition to careers in public service.

Mr. Speaker, the American Association for the Advancement of Science is to be congratulated for creating this successful and valuable congressional fellows program. And it is appropriate for us to recognize the contributions of more than 800 fellows who have participated in this program since 1973. I urge my colleagues to support this worthy resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I have no other speakers at this time. I will reserve the balance of my time.

MS. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT).

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Con. Res. 279 to recognize the importance of the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Fellowship Program. For 30 years, the fellowship program has brought together Members of Congress with leading scientific practitioners and scholars in a variety of scientific fields. And this has provided a level of scientific expertise not otherwise found on most congressional staffs, and it presents the congressional fellows with an intimate role in the process of decision-making in public policy.

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It is hard to find an issue before this body that does not have significant scientific and technological components, and yet those components often get short-shrifted. I was an AAAS Fellow 20 years ago, in fact, the only alumnus of that program yet to serve in this body, although I am sure that there are some others on the way. I was very fortunate to take part in that program, and I witnessed firsthand the important role that scientific expertise can bring to policy decisions.

Since I have been a Member of Congress for the past 5 years, I have welcomed AAAS Fellows into my staff and fully integrated them into my staff because of the wealth of knowledge they provide and their ability to pose questions. Of course, that is the essence of science, to be able to pose questions. I have benefited from their aptitude, their ability and their energy; and I will, as long as I serve in this body, continue to recruit these motivated and high-qualified experts and do everything I can to make this program a success. It has, in many ways, benefited America.

Let me mention a few of the Fellows who have served with me. Joan Rothenberg joined my staff and shared her expertise on food technology and was integral in developing legislation to provide the public with scientifically based information on biotechnology.

Katy Makeig provided my staff with technical expertise on geology and energy and research and development.

At the time our Nation was struggling with the anthrax attacks, microbiologist Jill Harper worked on my staff on critical issues of bioterrorism and health and homeland security.

Jeffrey Haeni helped to establish here the Congressional Caucus on Research and Development which I think will prove to be an important part of this body.

But it is not so much the specific expertise that these Fellows and that other science Fellows bring; it is the level of comfort with science and technology, the familiarity with science and technology that they bring.

Members of Congress, let me just say, are generally not loath to talk about subjects in which they are not well trained, except in science. My colleagues and I will hold forth on economics or international relations or any number of other things; but when it comes to science, they say, whoa, that is not for me. I am not a scientist. And as a result, many of the aspects of science, many of the aspects of the policy questions before us that involve science and technology do not get the attention they should. That is why this congressional Fellows program, this AAAS science program is so important. It is in many offices the only scientific expertise that is provided. This technical expertise is very valuable to Congress; and it allows not only these Fellows to bring scientific expertise here; it allows them to carry political expertise back to their professions.

So as AAAS celebrates 30 years in the Congressional Fellowship Program, I encourage all of my colleagues to join me, to join the sponsor, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS), in recognizing the notable contributions provided by these Fellows, the political expertise that they take back to their professions that enriches our country in so many ways, and to applaud the sponsoring societies for providing the support for these Fellows. It truly is a public service.

The AAAS seeks ''to advance science and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all people.'' The Congressional Fellowship Program carries that mission beyond the walls of academic institutions and research laboratories and into the legislative process.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) for his comments and his co-sponsorship on this resolution. I also thank him for his sponsorship on the previous resolution on National Chemistry Week. He and I, as most people know, are the only two physicists in the Congress and I am told are the only two that have ever served in this Congress. That, I think, is an indictment of the scientific community because we should have more scientists in the Congress, but most scientists tend to shy away from this particular type of activity. But the Fellows that we are honoring here have filled the gap, as the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) has so clearly outlined. They provide some very badly needed scientific advice.

I recognized the need for this some years ago before there was a fellowship program, and I contacted my Congressman and I worked with him over several years informally advising him on science. His name happened to be Gerald R. Ford. And I was very pleased when he became President and he continued to use some of the advice that I had given him.

The OTA came along and that relieved some of the need for scientific advice; but as we know, the OTA is no longer with us. And so the Fellows are extremely important in maintaining the scientific competence of the Congress, both House and Senate. Many of

the Fellows have returned to their laboratories where they serve as a good liaison between the scientific communities and the Congress. Many others have chosen to stay here; and I have one sitting immediately behind me, Ms. Amy Caroll, who served as science Fellow and now serves as my designee on the Committee on Science, particularly the Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards.

In my office I have a scientist Ellen Burns, who is currently my employee, but previously served as a science Fellow; and you will find many former science Fellows in the halls of Congress, in the administration, playing a very vital role in keeping this Nation's governing bodies current in science. So this has been a very valuable enterprise.

I was pleased to be involved in Fellows programs from the very start. I served on one of the first interviewing boards. We have come a long way since then because at that time scientists did not even know what it meant to become involved politically. Now we have a good network, thanks to the AAAS and the sponsoring societies; and it has been very, very beneficial to our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I urge support for the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that this resolution be adopted, and I thank all of those who have supported it and cosponsored it.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the congressional fellows program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The mission of the AAAS is to ''Advance science and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all people''. In pursuit of this mission, in 1973 the AAAS established a fellowship program designed to provide a unique public policy learning experience for scientist and to demonstrate the value of science-government interaction. From an initial cohort of seven Fellows, the AAAS program has grown over thirty years to include nearly one hundred Fellows each year, serving in both Houses of Congress and many agencies of the executive branch. Bringing technical backgrounds that range from astrophysics to veterinary radiology, AAAS Fellows have made important contributions to all areas of government policy. Many former Fellows have remained in Washington at the end of their twelve-month tenure, to become members of the scientific policymaking community. Others have returned to scientific careers with an enhanced appreciation of public policy, sharing this knowledge and experience with colleagues and students.

I have welcomed over twenty AAAS Fellows into my office since 1979 and have been consistently impressed by their contributions to policymaking and advising. They have made a significant positive impact on the quality of life for the people of Massachusetts, the United States, and the world by instilling a measure of science and humanity into the decisions we are asked to make in these chambers every day. I look forward to working with AAAS Fellows for another thirty years.

The following article from the Washington Post provides a useful look back at 30 years of the outstanding achievements of the AAAS science policy program.

[From the Washington Post, Sept. 18, 2003]

BRIDGING THIS GAP ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE

(By Rick Weiss)

In his famous 1959 treatise ''The Two Cultures,'' British scientist and novelist C.P. Snow decried the divide between scientists and ''literary intellectuals,'' warning that society's problems will remain largely intractable as long as scientists eschew Shakespeare and literary types remain ignorant about the second law of thermodynamics.

Washington has its own version of that cultural divide—this one involving scientists and politicians. How can the nation craft policies in such scientifically complex areas as embryonic stem cell research, global warming, agricultural biotechnology and ''Star Wars'' missile defense, experts in both camps moan, when so many politicians know so little about science and most scientists remain so clueless about how policy is made?

Enter the AAAS Science and Technology Fellows Program, a little-known but influential cultural exchange that serves as a wormhole between the largely alien universes of science and politics.

The program—coordinated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the nation's largest general science organization and publisher of the research journal Science—places about 60 PhD scientists in congressional and executive branch offices each fall for one-year stints. Celebrating its 30th anniversary this week, the program gives scientists a chance to explore the world of policy and politics while allowing lawmakers and administration officials to take advantage of the fellows' well-wired brains.

Scientists learn about a kind of sausage-making that never came up in their PhD food chemistry courses and bureaucrats get reminded that the universe cannot run on hot air alone.

Sometimes there is even a profound synthesis. In at least one case, involving a psychology fellow and a Treasury official, the cross-pollination between science and politics got so personal as to culminate in matrimony.

But perhaps the best measure of the program's success is the ubiquity of former fellows inside the Beltway today. Ten of about 50 staff members on the House Science Committee—including the committee's deputy chief of staff—are former fellows, as is one member of Congress: Rep. Rush D. Holt (D–N.J.). Other former fellows include the deputy director of the Department of Homeland Security's Advanced Research Projects Agency; the new chief science adviser at the State Department; and the deputy associate director of technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Perhaps no fellow is as appreciative of the program as psychologist Karen Kovacs North, now assistant dean for the School of Public Policy and Social Research at the University of California at Los Angeles. She met her husband in 1994 while on her AAAS stint in the office of Rep. Edward J. Markey (D–Mass.).

''We met banning Chinese assault weapons,'' she said.

Specifically, she first got Erik North, a Treasury official, in her cross hairs when he and some colleagues went to Markey's office to work with her on the wording of the pending Clinton importation ban.

''They came over with a bunch of guns and it scared the hell out of me,'' Kovacs North recalled. After months of work together, with the ban written and passed, it was dinner for two, long talks into the night ''and the rest,'' Kovac North said, ''is Hollywood history.''

They married in Malibu, Calif., in 1997. C.P. Snow would have cried with happiness.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 279 that recognizes the 30th anniversary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program.

Each year, this fine program brings to Capitol Hill talented individuals representing the natural, physical, and social sciences and all fields of engineering. Since its inception in 1973, over 800 AAAS Fellows have participated in this year-long experience in Congress.

This program is a remarkable partnership between Congress and the 30 or so participating professional societies that select and fund the Fellows. At no cost to Congress, these Fellows offer their substantial expertise and experience to various personal offices and committees in return for the opportunity to be immersed in the legislative process.

I have been fortunate enough to work with many AAAS fellows over my Congressional career. Without exception, they have been valuable additions to my staff. I especially appreciate the real world perspective they bring to us. While I've legislated in health care for several decades, I've never been trained in any of the health care disciplines. Having professionals on my staff who can provide that expertise has proved extremely beneficial and has probably helped keep well meant, but poorly designed legislation from becoming law on more than one occasion.

In my office, a fellow is treated exactly as other members of my staff. They have issue areas of expertise and perform all of the duties necessary to move those issues forward. Fellows have performed many tasks. One initiated innovative legislation to update Medicare's mental health coverage—which we are still attempting to enact years later. A more recent fellow developed legislation to restructure the Individuals with Disabilities Act so that we could meet our federal commitment to fully fund the education of students with disabilities. I could go on and on with examples of their contributions. The AAAS fellows in my office are always focused on health policy and are often psychologists. I know I speak for myself and many other members of my staff in saying that we have found that background useful personally as well as professionally.

The AAAS Fellowship program is a shining example of a collaborative program that benefits all whom participate. The fellows get a strong understanding of the legislative process and Congress gets the benefit of someone with real world expertise in areas in which we legislate.

I want to commend the AAAS for establishing this program and providing the infrastructure and organization that helps maintain its excellence. This program brings much needed scientific expertise to the halls of Congress and helps develop a cadre of scientific

professionals knowledgeable about public policy and the legislative process. I look forward to continuing to work with AAAS fellows. Over the years, they have become an integral part of my staff. Thanks again to AAAS for maintaining this valuable resource for Congress.

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 279, recognizing the significance of the 30th anniversary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program. I congratulate Mr. EHLERS for introducing it.

The AAAS has literally incalculable contributions to this institution and the nation. It has enabled scientists to have a better understanding of the governing process—both the fellows themselves and scientists with whom they interact—and it has improved the governing process by enabling Congressional offices to better understand scientific information and scientists.

The fellows program has also been an entry point for many of the best staff we have on Capitol Hill. We recognize the value of the AAAS program daily on the Science Committee, where ten of our staff members began their careers on the Hill as fellows. To take just three prominent examples, the minority chief of staff, Bob Palmer, and both my deputy chiefs of staffs, John Mimikakis and Peter Rooney, were AAAS fellows. Hopefully everyone will view that as an advertisement for the program.

I look forward to the speedy passage of this resolution and to the continued success of the AAAS program of the fellows themselves.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SCHROCK). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 279.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEE STUDENT LOAN ASSISTANCE ACT

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 926) to amend section 5379 of title 5, United States Code, to increase the annual and aggregate limits on student loan repayments by Federal agencies

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 926

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act''.

SEC. 2. STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENTS.

Section 5379(b)(2) of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by striking ''$6,000'' and inserting ''$10,000''; and

(2) in subparagraph (B), by striking ''$40,000'' and inserting ''$60,000''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on S. 926.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favor of S. 926, a bill introduced by my colleague, Senator VOINOVICH, to increase the annual and total limits of student loan repayments by executive branch agencies.

This is identical to a bill that I introduced on the House side, H.R. 3080. We are considering the Senate version of this bill, the Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act, which has already passed that Chamber in an effort to speed up approval of this important piece of legislation.

I want to thank the leadership for bringing this matter to the floor today. As the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service, Census and Agency Organization of the Committee on Government Reform, I have raised the same questions at many of our hearings this year: How do we attract the most qualified people to government service and how do we keep them once they have started?

Recruiting, retraining, and rewarding talented and hardworking individuals are at the very core of making our civil service the best that it can be. Very clearly, having the ability to tell potential recruits, come work for the United States Government and we can help you repay your student loans, is an extremely valuable tool.

All of us are surely aware of how expensive a college or graduate-level education is. And it is the prospect of these daunting student loans, $50,000, $75,000, or even more than $100,000, that can prevent public service-minded people from coming to work for the government. They simply cannot afford it.

Student loan repayment is at the top of the list for newly graduated students looking for jobs. To keep up with the higher salaries of the private sector and nonprofit organizations, the Federal Government must have an effective student loan repayment program. This legislation before us today raises the annual maximum amount that agencies could give towards student loan repayment, from $6,000 a year to $10,000 a year. It also raises the total amount an agency can contribute toward an individual's loan, from $40,000 to $60,000. These changes reflect the increases in annual college tuition costs since the Federal Government's original Student Loan Repayment Bill was enacted in 1991.

All funds to pay for the repayment program come out of the agencies' own budgets, so this legislation has no negative impact on the current budget. It is the right thing to do and something that we must do in order to remain competitive in the job market. I strongly urge my colleagues to pass the Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act before us today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, rising tuition rates force families to borrow thousands of dollars to fund their children's college education. The debt that these families and new graduates face after graduation is daunting. The majority of college students today will have more loans over $20,000 by the time they graduate. Public and private employees who administer programs that could help employees reduce their college loan costs have a valuable recruitment and retention tool. The Federal Student Loan Program permits Federal agencies to repay federally insured student loans as a tool to attract or retain highly qualified employees.

Under current law, agencies may authorize a student loan repayment of up to $6,000 for an employee in any year and up to a lifetime limit of $40,000. An employee receiving this benefit must sign a service agreement to remain in the service of the paying agency for at least 3 years. If an employee leaves the agency before that time, he or she must reimburse the agency for the loan repayment. S. 926, the Federal Employee Student Loan Assistance Act, will increase the allowed annual loan repayment from $6,000 to $10,000 and the allowed life-time loan repayment allowed from $40,000 to $60,000. The increases reflect the rising college tuition costs since enactment of the original statute in 1991.

Several agencies have reported that the use of program has helped them achieve their recruitment and retention goals. However, the program is generally underutilized due to lack of agency funding caused by limited budgets. If government service is to become a viable and attractive option for college graduates and talented employees, the Federal Government must use all the tools and resources at its disposal to attract and retain these individuals. S. 926 is a step in the right direction; but without funding and without aggressive use of this and similar programs to promote Federal civil service,